

March 5, 2009

Senator Taylor Brown
Montana Senate
P.O. Box 200500
Helena, MT 59620-0500

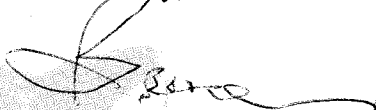
Dear Senator Brown,

Thank you for spending the time to discuss your bill SB 486 with me. As I mentioned in my initial e-mail, the Billings Chamber of Commerce/CVB supports the concept of transparency in government, however we cannot support your bill in its original draft form. In the case of Billings, this would allow less than 1/10 of 1% of our municipal population to petition for independent investigation and hearing, since the bill states that "the petition must be signed by at least 5% or at least 100 residents of the municipality, whichever is less". Since the underlying issue is the City of Billings Public Safety Mill Levy and the desire of the Firefighters Local to hire an additional 7 firefighters in addition to the \$4 million settlement they received through legal action, in effect the 110 members of this union would have the capacity to fulfill the petition requirements from within their own membership. No group or organization should be granted this ability, especially if it is as self-serving as this is.

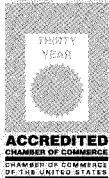
We recommend that you consider amending the legislation in Section (2) (b) to read: "The Petition must be signed by at least 5% ~~or at least 100 residents~~ of the residents of the municipality, ~~whichever is less~~, and must be submitted to the municipal clerk." This would allow a reasonable number of voters the opportunity to request an independent hearing and investigation, without allowing a very few members of the community to control the petition process.

While there are other concerns with the bill, if this change in the minimum is made, the Billings Chamber/CVB would move from opposition to a neutral position.

Sincerely,



Bruce MacIntyre
Director, Government Affairs



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A large, faint background illustration of a herd of cattle grazing in a field.

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BiLLiNGS
Billings Chamber of Commerce
Convention and Visitors Bureau